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ABSTRACT

In order to study the persistence of poverty across generations with a view to developing or monitoring cross-generational poverty-reduction policies, social indicators to track dependency and deprivation of children are needed. Available data on the dependency and deprivation of children primarily describe the following characteristics of the situation of adults and their households: (1) net family income; (2) wealth; (3) health; (4) household composition; and (5) employment characteristics. In order to measure deprivation and dependency for children, factors important in shaping a child's social, emotions, cognitive, and educational development must be understood. A list of those factors goes beyond that which is the focus of current government data collection efforts. However, a modest program containing many of the necessary elements is now in operation, namely, the National Longitudinal Survey, a longitudinal data collection effort which allows a look at three generations. Data from this study have shown the importance of such factors as level of the mother's education, high school environment, household and community factors, father presence, the local crime rate, and early parenthood. These types of indicators provide effective assessment of the factors that assist children to exit poverty. However, recent cutbacks in data collection have reduced the ability to provide a complete view of all factors. Included are 16 bar graphs and 4 tables. (JB)

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Statement of

Dr. Randall J. Olsen

Professor of Economics

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before the

Subcommittee on Social Security and Family Policy

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It is an honor to be here today to speak on the topic of social indicators to track dependency. I will speak primarily in regard to measuring dependency for children and how this relates to the persistence of poverty across generations. The tragedy of deprivation among children is that while they are the least responsible for the problems they face, deprivation strikes them the hardest, for they have insufficient maturity, knowledge, or economic and social resources to withstand or ameliorate the penalties associated with deprivation. Their social, emotional and cognitive development may be retarded by deprivation, making it more likely they will, in turn, suffer dependency as adults.

As we look at the available data on the dependency and deprivation of children we see an array of numbers collected primarily to describe the situation of adults and their households. The situation of an adult is fairly well described by net family income, wealth, health, household composition, and employment characteristics. For children, data of these sorts on the parents or parent-figures in the household provide important information about the economic circumstances of the child and its family. However, if our objective is to develop or monitor cross-generational poverty-reduction policies, more relevant indicators are needed to measure the dependence and deprivation of children. We need a broader

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range of information to determine how to influence the ability of our children to develop into well-adjusted and successful adults.

In order to measure deprivation and dependency for children, we need to understand which factors are important in shaping a child's social, emotional, cognitive, and educational development. Neither I nor anyone else can claim knowledge of exactly what determines child development, but we can round up the usual suspects. Not only is the presence of parents in the household important, but it matters who the parents are, how well they were educated, whether substance abuse is a problem, and how the parents and child interact. Moving away from the immediate household, we acknowledge the importance of community characteristics, such as the peer group for the child, the safety of the home and neighborhood, and the presence of a larger family network. Moving yet further away from the home, we look to the characteristics of the school, its teachers, and students as well as the quantity and quality of community involvement in the schools. Is the school atmosphere conducive to learning, or must the school put most of its attention into maintaining order and compensating for serious home life deprivations? What sorts of support structures are available to the child in the school and the community at large? Does the child who is entitled to these support services actually receive them? Finally, what sorts of economic opportunities do older children and adolescents see locally and is this future economic vision sufficiently attractive to encourage these children to make sustained scholastic efforts?

This list of factors that we suspect influence the social, emotional, educational, and psychological development of children and adolescents goes far beyond what the government currently collects to track dependency and its impact upon children. We need to measure all these data elements for a nationally representative sample of children, following them over the course of their lives and the lives of their children. In addition, we must constantly reexamine the data we collect to learn which aspects of a child's upbringing and environment are most crucial to development and therefore in which areas deprivation is most likely to lead to a perpetuation of dependency across generations. These sensitive aspects of background then must be weighted more heavily in any social indicator of dependency among children.

While this is a very demanding program of data collection, the government is already supporting a modest program containing many of these necessary elements. Not surprisingly, this effort dates back to Senator Moynihan's time as an Assistant Secretary of Labor and his advocacy of a longitudinal data collection effort through the Department of Labor. That proposal became the National Longitudinal Surveys, known as the NLS, a project currently conducted under the aegis of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Commissioner Norwood's testimony used some of these data. One of the cohorts being studied in the NLS is a group of persons who were 14 - 21 in 1979 and who have been interviewed yearly since then. This longitudinal data collection effort has evolved over the years and currently collects many of the data elements necessary to study the antecedents of dependency. Considerable credit is due the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and BLS for cooperatively supporting research in this area. Since 1986 NICHD has funded the systematic assessment of the developmental progress of the children of the female respondents in this group with the goal of determining which aspects of the home and social environment are important influences on child development. A battery of child assessments were administered in 1986 and again in 1988 to track child development. While this program is not as comprehensive as one would hope, it does supply a place to start as we look at the related problems of deprivation and dependency and their impact upon the ability of children to achieve their potential as adults.

The NLS data allow us to look at three generations. First, for this sample of young adults we may determine the fraction living in poverty in 1979, typically a reflection of their parents' poverty status. Second, in 1988 we see these youths nine years later when they are 23 - 30 and their poverty status reflects more their own income. Finally, by looking at the development of the children of the female respondents we can see which children may be headed toward a third generation of dependency. I will attempt to give a brief overview of some of the empirical regularities that emerge from these data as they relate to possible indicators of future dependency and its persistence across generations.

For the children of the female respondents we determine whether they fall in the lower 20% of the distributions for the Peabody Individual Achievement Tests of reading and mathematical ability, called PIAT tests, and whether these children are also in the 20% of the group having the most severe behavioral problems, according to the testing scale we use. Adverse outcomes on the PIAT tests and the

Behavior Problems Index presage additional problems in adolescence and adulthood and may be taken as indicators a child is at risk for future dependency. For children whose mothers came from poor families in 1979 and are still in poverty in 1988, adverse PIAT or Behavior Problem scores suggest these children are at risk of being in the third generation of welfare dependency.

While the most powerful predictor of whether one of our respondents was in poverty in 1988 is whether that same respondent was in poverty as an adolescent in 1979, there are a number of other factors that mediate that effect. I would like to give a few examples of how environmental factors correlate with the probability an adolescent who was poor in 1979 was also poor in 1988, which we will use as an imperfect indicator of the persistence of poverty across generations.

We find for young people in poverty in 1979 that more education for the mother is associated with a lower probability the young person will still be in poverty in 1988. This effect is stronger for females than males, and stronger for Blacks than other groups. Household composition has an important effect. The presence of two parents in the household reduces the rate at which adolescents in poor households in 1979 are still in poor households in 1988, with the presence of the father in the household having an especially strong effect on the transition of their daughters out of poverty. This is consistent with other work showing the presence of the natural father in the household has an important effect in reducing adolescent fertility.

The high school environment also has an effect on the rate at which adolescents move out of poverty. A school in the upper quartile in terms of the number of economically disadvantaged students is more closely linked with poverty persistence for females, with schools in the upper quartile for school absence rates being associated with a slightly higher poverty persistence rate for males. General community characteristics are also important. Poor youths living in especially disadvantaged areas in 1979 were more likely to still be poor in 1988 than was the case for youths living in more prosperous counties. A higher local crime rate, higher unemployment, and a higher rate of AFDC recipiency in the county were all associated with persisting poverty. It is not just the fact of being poor; where you were poor has an important effect on the probability of being trapped in poverty.

The clearest markers of a youth's prospects for future dependency are his or her own actions as an adolescent. Background factors of the sort I have just described seem to have their primary effect by altering the behavior of the adolescent, for example, by changing the probability the youth will drop out of school, with actions taken while an adolescent changing the prospects for success as an adult. The educational attainment of the youth has a very powerful effect on poverty persistence, especially for females where being a school dropout is closely linked with being a teenage unwed mother. The heavy use of alcohol is another factor which increases persistence in poverty, although the effect of alcohol use and frequent criminal activity for young men are not as important markers of future welfare dependency.

Variations in these household and community factors influence the development of children, and such factors become indicators of the degree to which children are at risk of continuing in dependency.

When we look at the PIAT verbal and math achievement scores and the Behavior Problems Index for the children of our female respondents, we can see poverty already is affecting the development of these children, many of whom are still quite young. Overall, persistence in poverty for the mother has serious effects on the cognitive development of the child. When we look at the PIAT reading and math scores for children living in poor households in 1988 and whose mothers also lived in poor households in 1979, such children are nearly four times as likely to be in the bottom 20% for these tests and twice as likely to have fairly serious behavior problems as children whose mothers had never been poor. Compared to the children of never poor women, children whose mothers had been poor in 1979 but not in 1988 were a little more than twice as likely to fall in the bottom 20% on these tests and one and one-half times as likely to have fairly serious behavior problems. The children of women who were not in poverty in 1979 but <u>were</u> in poverty in 1988 had cognitive deficits about as serious as the children of women who had managed to leave poverty since 1979, so the grasp of poverty across generations is not easily escaped. When it comes to behavior problems, what appears to matter most is whether the child is in a poor family now rather than whether the mother came from a poor family. Even in childhood we see the foundation being laid for poverty in adulthood.

As noted above, the education of the mother has a large effect on the likelihood a youth who is poor in 1979 will still be poor in 1988. When we look at the third generation, the children of these young persons, we see early signs confirming the importance of the education of one's mother. Children whose mothers have had some college score significantly higher on our reading and math tests than children whose mothers are not high school graduates, even after holding constant the mother's poverty status in 1979 and 1988. Children who are not minorities and whose mothers were poor in either 1979 or 1988 show cognitive deficits similar to minority children whose mothers had a comparable history of being in poverty. The largest differences in cognitive development by race are observed for children whose mothers were poor in neither 1979 or 1988. There is a large gap in our reading and math scores between Black and Hispanic children whose mothers were not poor in either 1979 or 1988 versus other children whose mothers were not poor in these years.

The importance of the father's presence in the household as a factor reducing teenage pregnancy and subsequent poverty is confirmed in looking at the cognitive development of younger children. Whatever the poverty status of the mother in 1979 and 1988, children whose fathers are in the household in 1988 are less likely to have serious behavior problems and less likely to have scored near the bottom on the PIAT reading and math tests.

Let me now develop some of these themes in a little more detail and provide some graphics ilustrating relationships between cross-genertional poverty and factors such as home, community background, and the actions taken by young men and women. In what follows I will concentrate on poverty persistence for young persons in particular groups by showing the rate at which they were poor in 1979, and, for those who were poor in 1979, the fraction of that subgroup who were also poor in 1988. This exposition suppresses some of the detail on transitions into and out of poverty in order to focus on poverty persistence.

Figure 1 starts by showing the nature of the problem for different race-sex groups. Poverty rates were not only higher for Blacks, and to a lesser degree Hispanics, when they were adolescents in 1979, but the rates at which Blacks and Hispanics persist in poverty is higher. Persistence in poverty is greater for young women, probably because adolescent fertility also persists across generations.

However, even within these race-sex groups and controlling for poverty status in 1979, other factors intervene to influence the persistence of poverty.

Percent Poor in 1979 and Percent of Those Poor in 1979 Who Are Still Poor in 1988

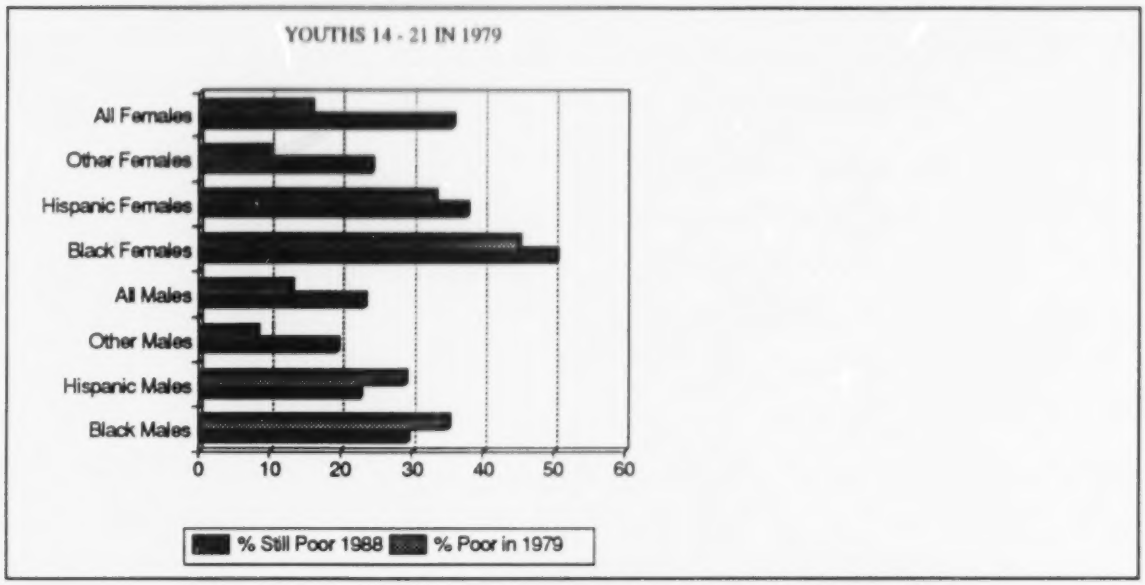

Figure 1 Poverty Rates and Poverty Persistence Rates by Race and Sex

In Figures 2 through 7 we see that the mother's education is a powerful variable in explaining poverty persistence. Regardless of race or sex, the better educated the mother the more likely a young person is to escape poverty. It is very possible mother's education serves as an indicator of how far below the poverty line the family lies, and may also indicate a number of other problems in the household. I caution these figures are one-factor analyses, so having a mother who never completed high school may reflect the fact she was a teenage mother, the family has no father present, or other problems associated with severe poverty. A more complete analysis requires statistical analysis rather than graphical exposition.

Whether the young person comes from an intact family is also important. In Figures 8 through 11 we see that youths from poor but intact families are more likely to exit poverty. While having

the father present in the family may indicate the youth has been subject to less virulent poverty, this regularity suggests the importance of including family background factors as summary measures of the deprivation of children. Keeping track of whether the child is in a family unit below the poverty line or is the beneficiary of a transfer program does not adequately summarize the situation of the child. Ideally, we would like to track the composition of the child's home longitudinally.

Community characteristics likewise mediate the persistence in poverty. In Figures 12 and 13 we show that the characteristics of a young person's high school is important. For males we look at whether the high school was in the quartile with the highest absence rates, and find when absence from the youth's high school is a problem the young man is less likely to escape poverty. For females the fraction of students in the school who are disadvantaged is related to poverty persistence. This suggests that an attempt to monitor the situation of children in poverty should also examine the quality of the local schools. Schools with high absence rates or economically disadvantaged student bodies suggest poverty persistence not because of these particular attributes, but because of the educational achievement of the peer group and the ability of the school to enhance the education of its students. More work needs to be done relating school attributes to poverty persistence.

We also see in Figure 14 the local crime rate is important, with young men who come from high crime counties being more likely to remain in poverty. Figure 15 shows local unemployment rates are also related to poverty persistence for young men. The importance of such ecological factors at the county or even SMSA level underlines an important weakness in many of the data collected to assess dependency. For example, the Survey of Income and Program Participation does not allow detailed ecological data to be released to the general research community because of confidentiality restrictions. This seriously degrades the ability to use SIPP to study dependency and poverty persistence. SIPP does not collect the detailed ecological and cognitive data on children we have exploited here using the NLS, but the charge to SIPP was to collect detailed data on dependency and program participation. Much more is needed to evaluate the well-being and development of children in poverty.

The activities of young persons are important markers of being at risk for continued poverty. The actions of the adolescent must be examined in the context of his or her surroundings. Perhaps the

most important marker of future dependency for adolescents is teenage child bearing. Figure 16 shows how closely adolescent childbearing is linked to poverty persistence. It goes without saying that the ability of a young adult to find and hold a full-time job by 1988 is likewise closely associated with poverty persistence.

The actions of an adolescent reflect the cumulative experience from birth through pre-adolescence. While there is no deterministic rule that maps one's family background and community characteristics into adolescent behavior and then poverty as a young adult, there seems to be ample evidence fifteen years of environment are important. While our data do not contain detailed information about these young people during their early childhood, we do have data on the children of our female respondents that allow us to examine early childhood outcomes that may point to future problems.

For the young women in our sample we compute the fraction of their children who are scoring in the lowest 20% of the PIAT reading and math tests we administer as well as the fraction of their children who fall in the 20% of the population having the most severe behavior problems. In Table 1 we relate the fraction falling in the bottom quintiles by these measures to the present and past poverty status of the mother. The results are hardly surprising. The children of young women who persist in poverty show substantial and significant cognitive deficits.

While being in poverty has a large effect on the development of children, problems can be ameliorated or aggravated by other characteristics of the family unit. Just as the education of the mothers of the young women in our sample had a powerful effect upon the rate at which these youths stayed in poverty, in Table 2 we see early signs that the least educated of our young women in poverty have children already with significant learning deficits relative to the children of better educated but still poor young women. About 36% of young women who were high-school dropouts were poor in 1979, and of these, about 63% were poor in 1988. Contrast this with women having some college, of whom 11% were poor in 1979, but of these women who were poor in 1979, only 16% were poor in 1988, a far lower rate of poverty persistence than the 63% for high-school dropouts. If we look at the children from these two groups of women and look only at children whose mothers were poor in both 1979 and 1988, we see about 34% of the children whose mothers were dropouts had cognitive deficits that put them in the

bottom 20% while if the mother had attended some college only about 25% of the children scored in the bottom quintile. The disparity in behavior problems among these children in poor homes is especially large when we look at mother's education.

The disadvantages of having a mother who was a teenage parent are clear from Table 3 where we see regardless of family poverty the children of teenage mothers almost uniformly have lower cognitive scores and more behavioral problems. The fact that we see such strong effects on cognitive deficits for the children of teenage mothers corresponds to the effects on poverty persistence we have already shown. In the cognitive deficits and behavioral problems of children of teenage mothers lie the antecedents of problems in adolescence. Finally, in Table 4 we show the impact of having a mother who engaged in one or more fairly serious criminal activities. There are cognitive deficits here as well as some fairly sizeable increases in the likelihood of behavioral problems, suggesting social maladjustment can be handed down to the next generation. Family composition matters a lot, even after controlling for poverty.

If we wish to assess how we are doing in supporting our children so they have a chance to exit poverty, we need to construct indicators that are measuring those factors we believe are important in explaining their educational and social development. Tracking family income and program dependency is important, but many other factors influence the child's development and we cannot obtain an accurate view of dependency if we ignore them. We need to think more broadly in terms of our program of longitudinal data collection and the analysis of those data. There is activity in this area of research and attention has been given to which data to collect and how to analyze them.

There is a lot of exciting research being done studying the factors that explain variation in the social, psychological, and educational development of children. This work may be helpful in selecting possible indicators of current and prospective dependency for children. The selection of indicators places heavy demands on the data, and, quite frankly, some serious cut-backs in data collection have reduced our ability to provide a more complete view of those factors.

Percent Poor in 1979 and Percent of Those Poor in 1979 Who Are Still Poor in 1988

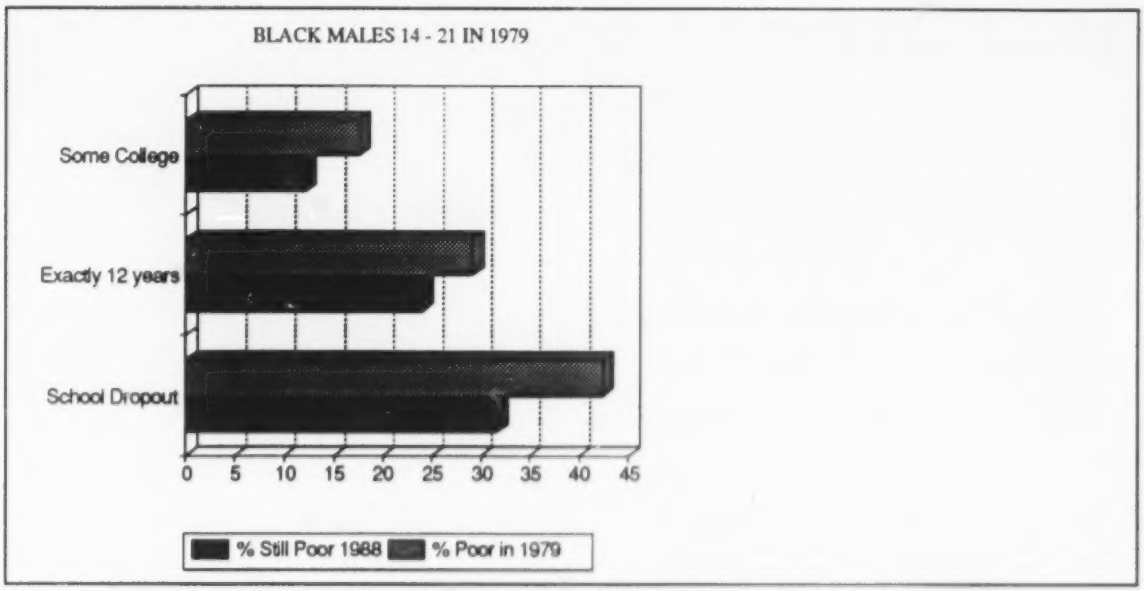

Figure 2 Mother's Education, Poverty and Poverty Persistence for Black Males

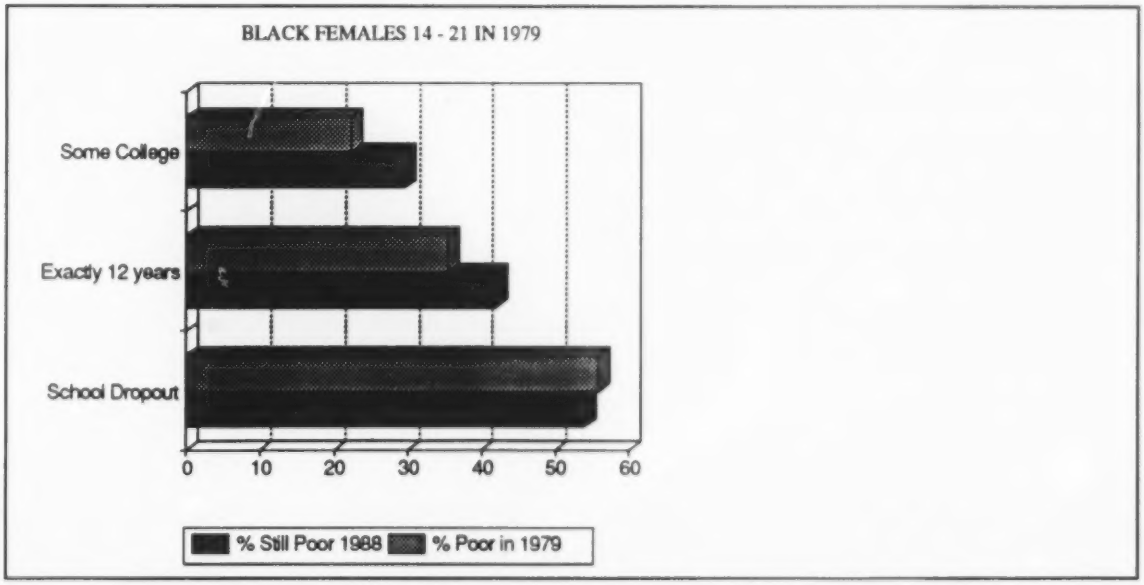

Figure 3 Mother's Education, Poverty and Poverty Persistence for Black Females

Percent Poor in 1979 and Percent of Those Poor in 1979 Who Are Still Poor in 1988

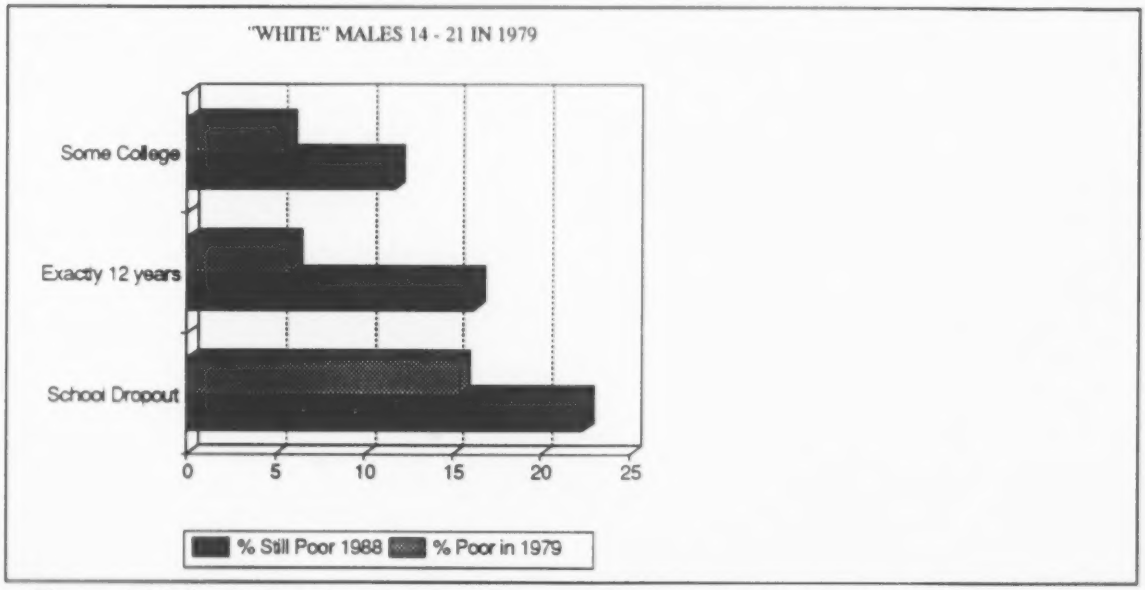

Figure 4 Mother's Education, Poverty and Poverty Persistence for Non-Black, Non-Hispanic Males

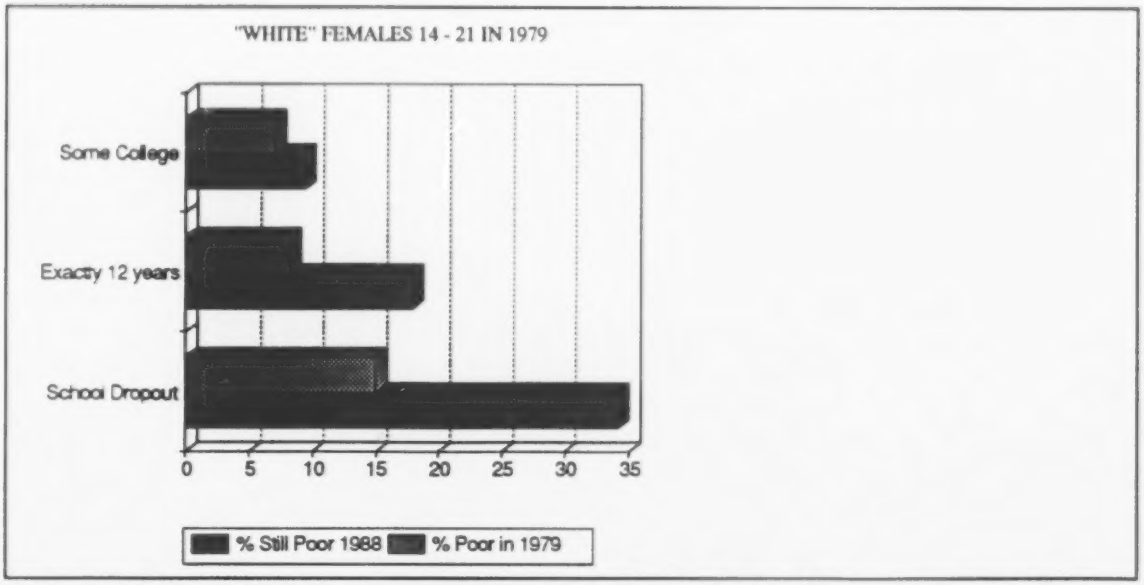

Figure 5 Mother's Education, Poverty and Poverty Persistence for Non-Black, Non-Hispanic Females

Percent Poor in 1979 and Percent of Those Poor in 1979 Who Are Still Poor in 1988

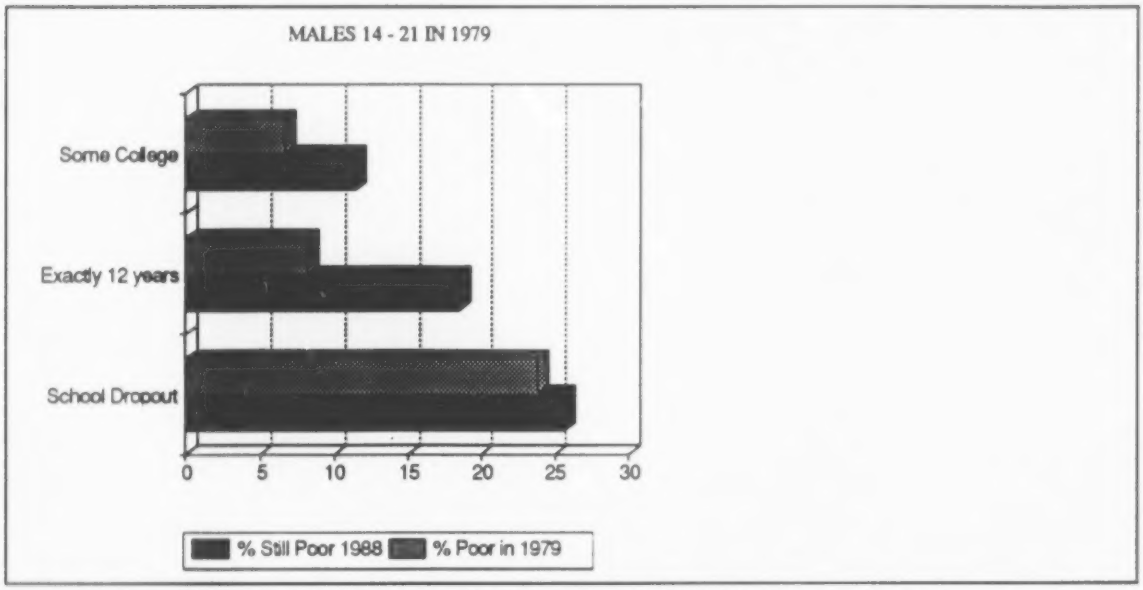

Figure 6 Mother's Education, Poverty and Poverty Persistence for Males

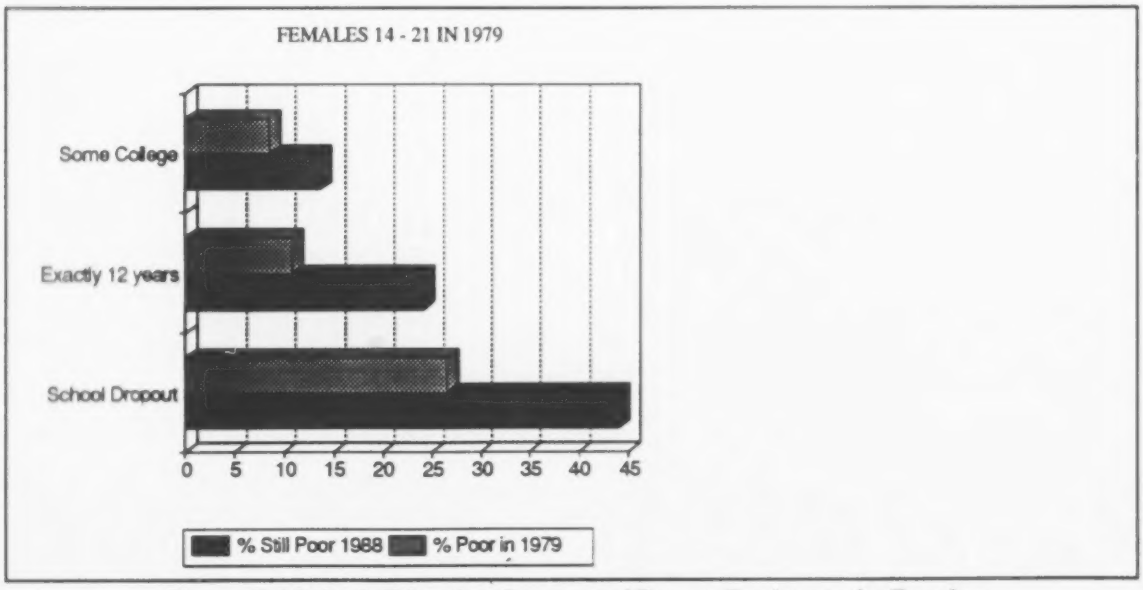

Figure 7 Mother's Education, Poverty and Poverty Persistence for Females

Percent Poor in 1979 and Percent of Those Poor in 1979 Who Are Still Poor in 1988

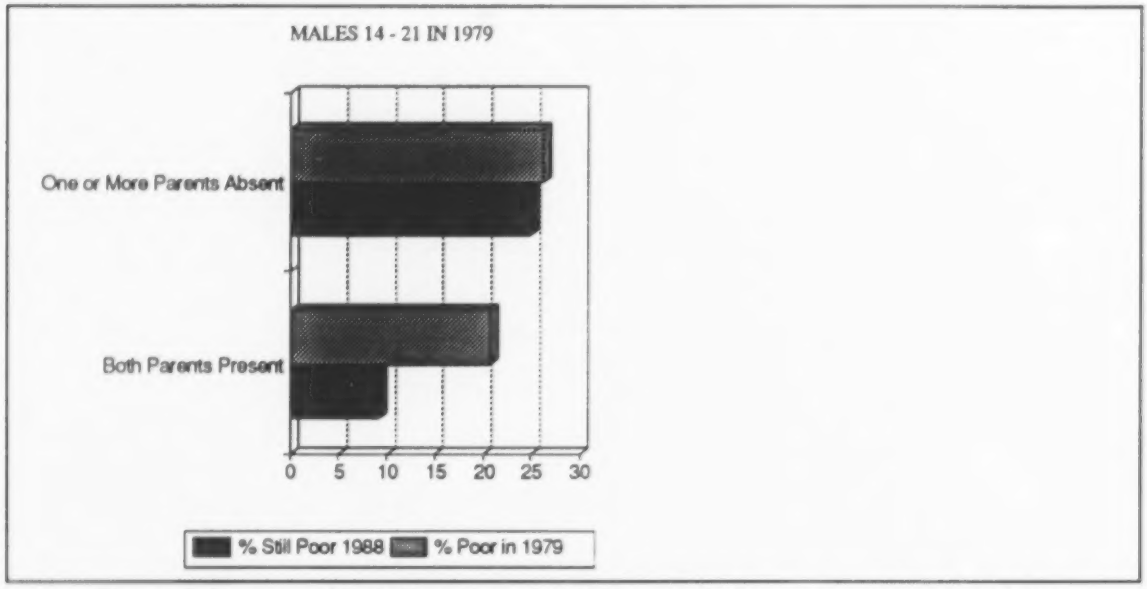

Figure 8 Presence of Both Parents at Age 14. Poverty and Poverty Persistence for Males

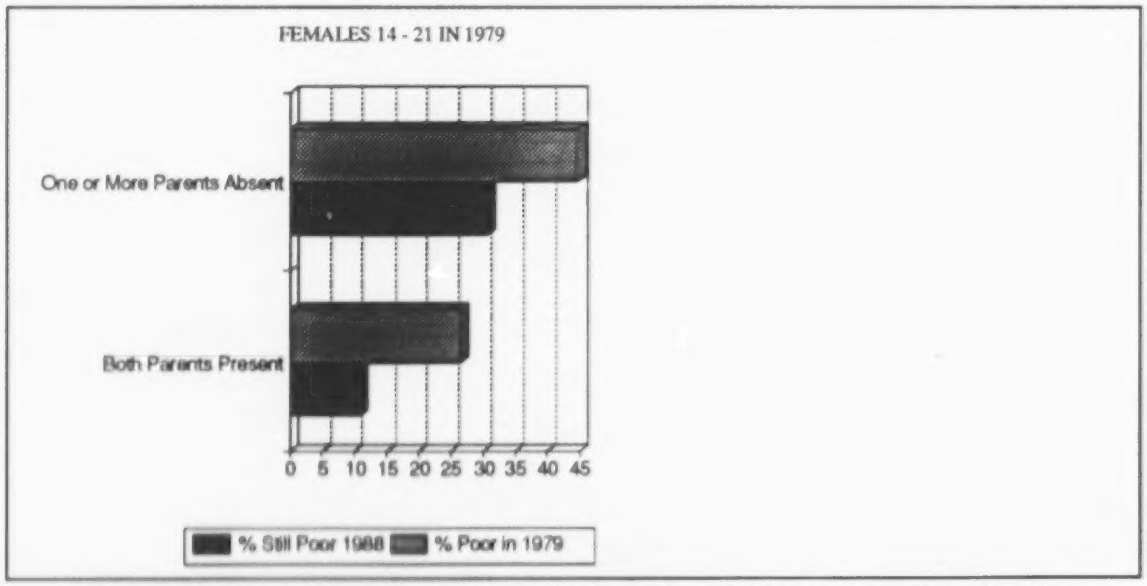

Figure 9 Presence of Both Parents at Age 14. Poverty and Poverty Persistence for Females

Percent Poor in 1979 and Percent of Those Poor in 1979 Who Are Still Poor in 1988

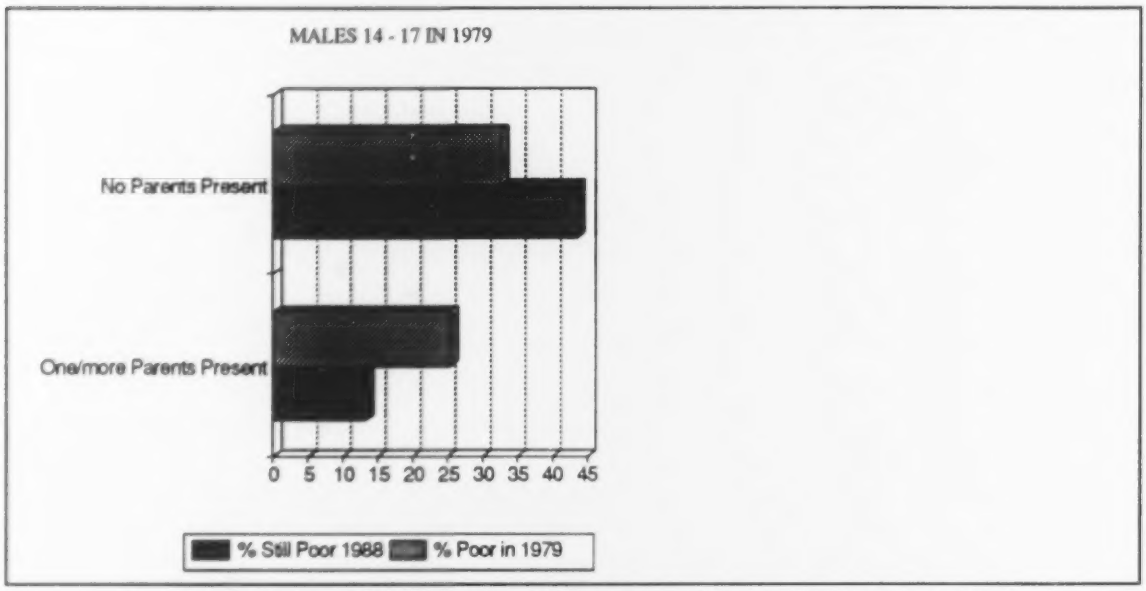

Figure 10 Presence of One Parent in 1979, Poverty and Poverty Persistence for Males

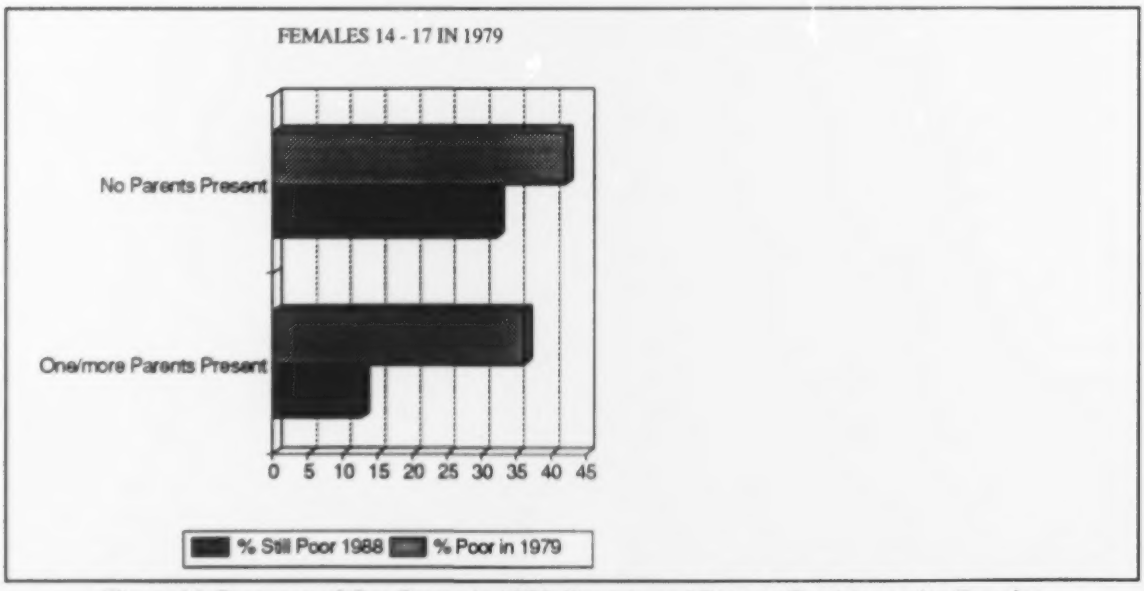

Figure 11 Presence of One Parent in 1979, Poverty and Poverty Persistence for Females

Percent Poor in 1979 and Percent of Those Poor in 1979 Who Are Still Poor in 1988

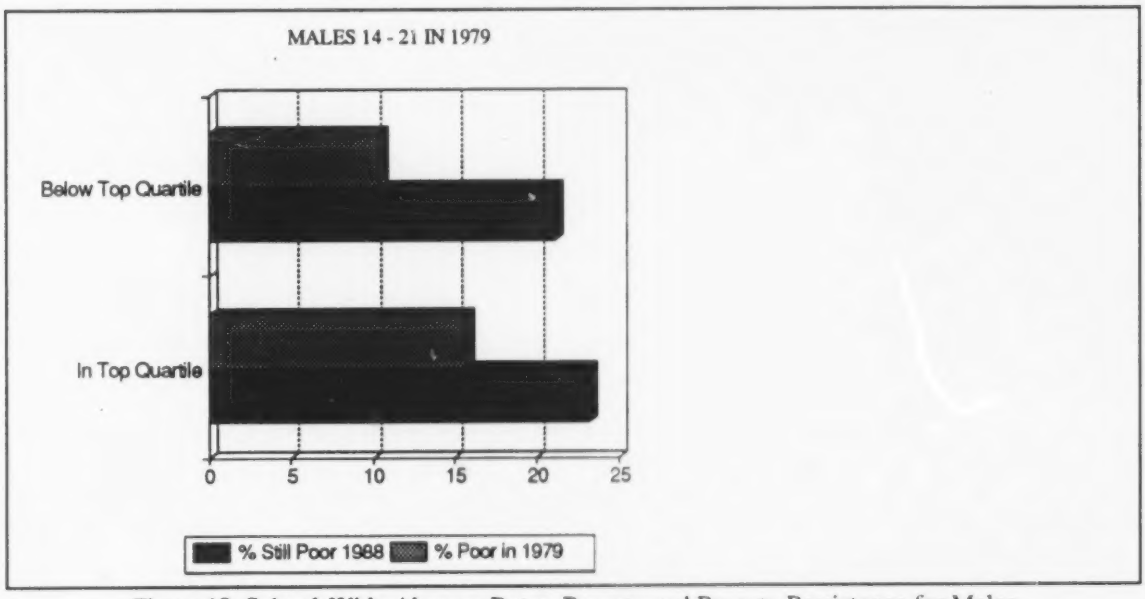

Figure 12 School-Wide Absence Rates, Poverty and Poverty Persistence for Males

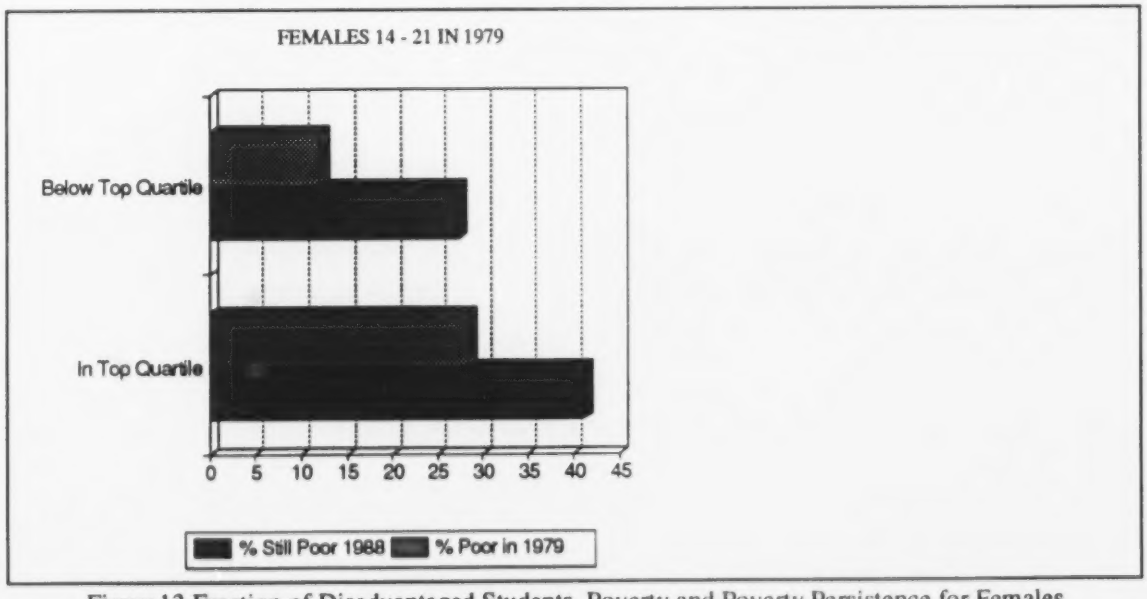

Figure 13 Fraction of Disadvantaged Students, Poverty and Poverty Persistence for Females

Percent Poor in 1979 and Percent of Those Poor in 1979 Who Are Still Poor in 1988

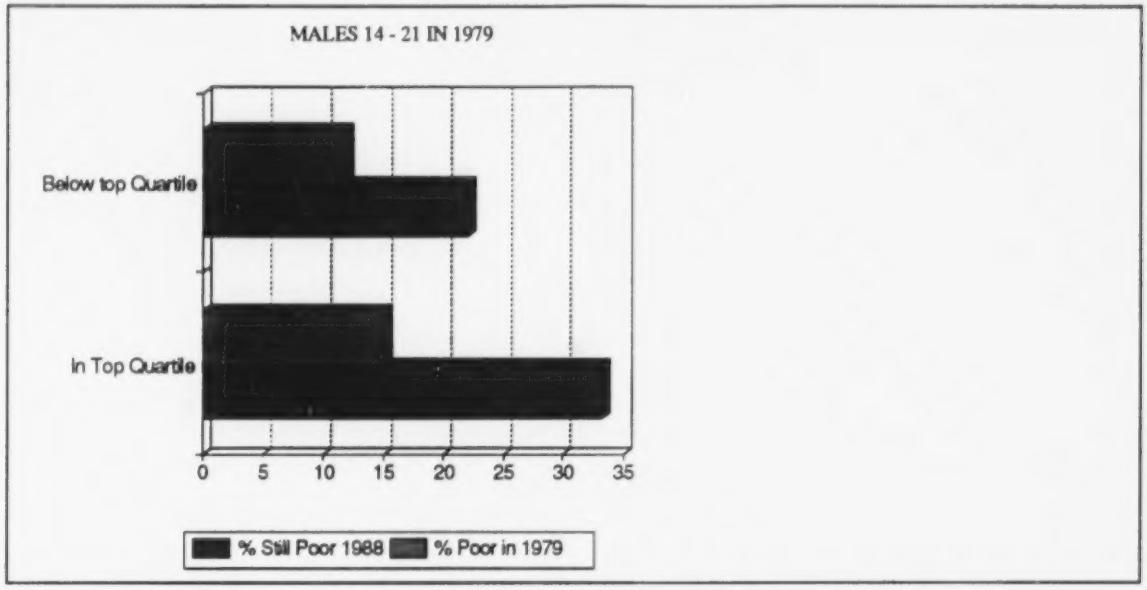

Figure 14 Local Crime Rate, Poverty and Poverty Persistence for Males

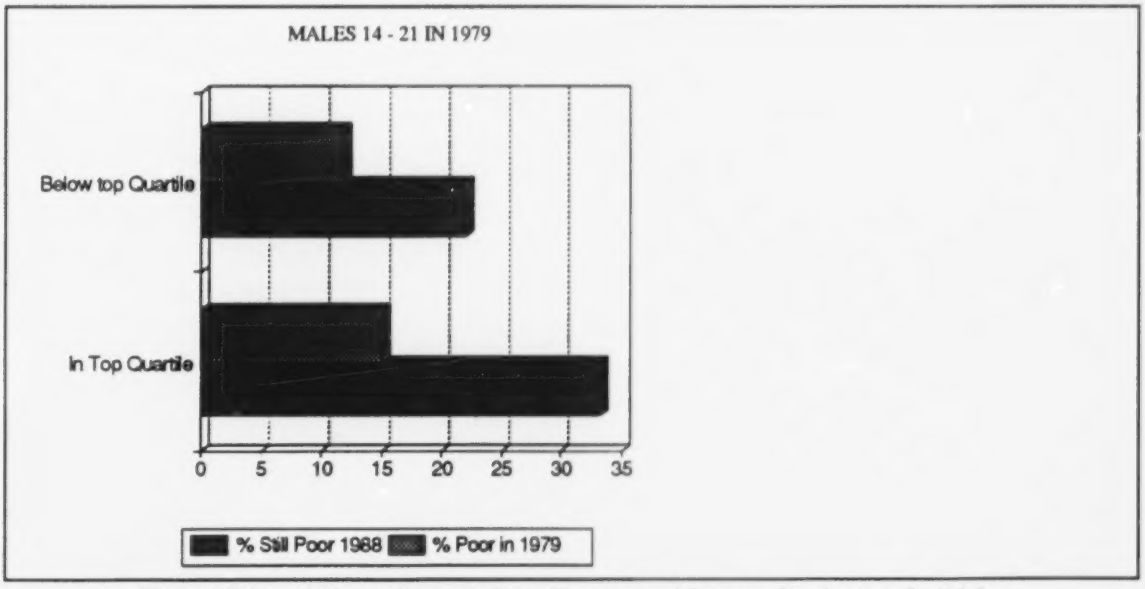

Figure 15 Local Unemployment Rate, Poverty and Poverty Persistence for Males

Percent Poor in 1979 and Percent of Those Poor in 1979 Who Are Still Poor in 1988

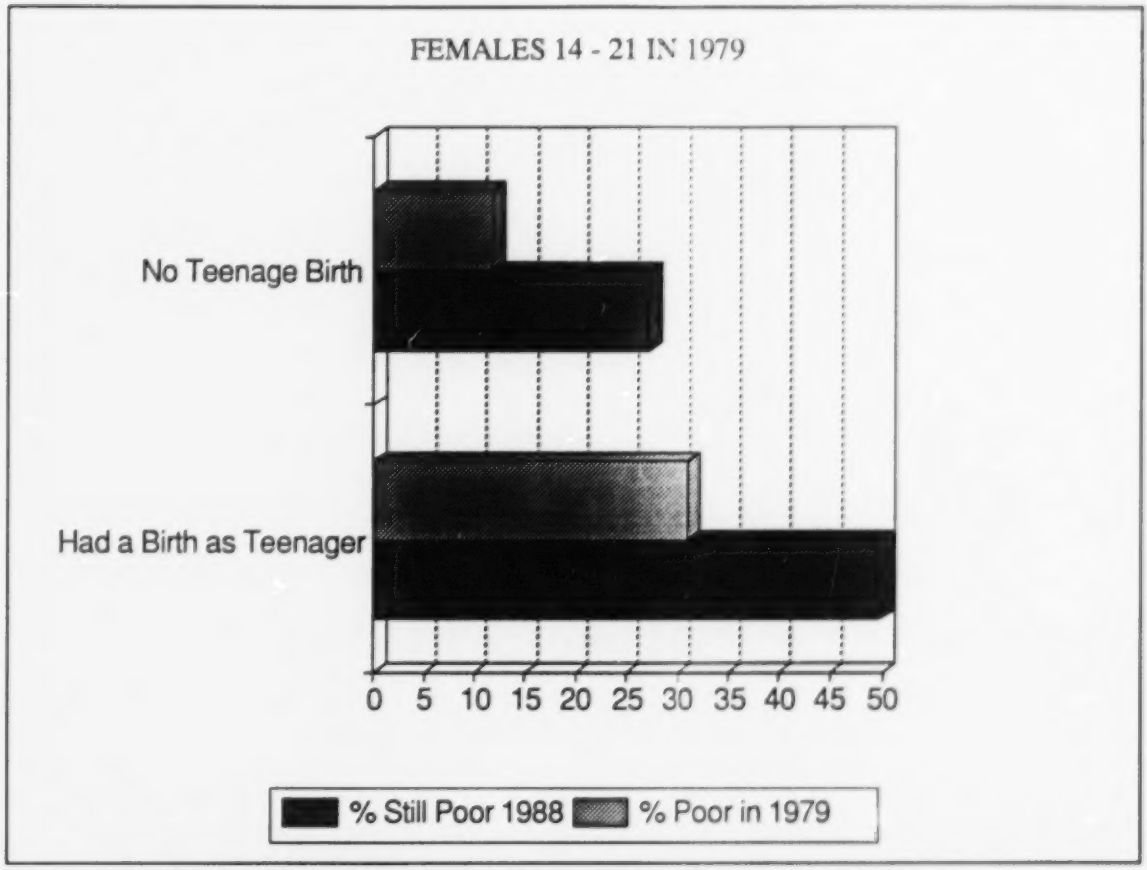

Figure 16 Teenage Pregnancy, Poverty and Poverty Persistence for Females

Table 1

Percent of Children Scoring in Worst Quintiles of Behavior Problems Index and PIAT Reading and Math Scales by Mother's Poverty Status in 1979 and 1988

Percent Poor in 1979	15.8	
Percent of Those Poor in 1979 Also Poor in 1988	35.6	
% Children Low Reading		31.1
% Children Low Math		35.3
% Children High Behavior Problem Index		25.4
Percent of Those Poor in 1979 Not Poor in 1988	64.4	
% Children Low Reading		21.0
% Children Low Math		20.8
% Children High Behavior Problem Index		19.2
Percent Not Poor in 1979	84.2	
Percent of Those Not Poor in 1979 Poor in 1988	12.0	
% Children Low Reading		20.8
% Children Low Math		25.0
% Children High Behavior Problem Index		31.3
Percent of Those Not Poor in 1979 Also Not Poor in 1988	88.0	
% Children Low Reading		8.7
% Children Low Math		9.1
% Children High Behavior Problem Index		13.1

Table 2
Percent of Children Scoring in Worst Quintiles of Behavior Problems Index and PIAT Reading and Math Scales
by Mother's Highest Grade Completed and Poverty Status in 1979 and 1988

	Poor 1979	Not Poor 1979
High-School Dropout	36.3	63.7
Poor 1988	62.6	33.7
% Children Low Reading	33.3	25.3
% Children Low Math	35.0	28.8
% Children High Behavior Problem Index	28.9	31.4
Not Poor 1988	37.4	66.3
% Children Low Reading	21.8	14.3
% Children Low Math	23.2	8.8
% Children High Behavior Problem Index	18.6	16.6
High-School Graduate	15.2	84.8
Poor 1988	34.5	14.9
% Children Low Reading	28.3	20.1
% Children Low Math	38.7	23.9
% Children High Behavior Problem Index	21.7	30.1
Not Poor 1988	65.5	85.1
% Children Low Reading	26.4	8.2
% Children Low Math	22.7	9.9
% Children High Behavior Problem Index	25.4	14.1
Completed Some College	11.4	88.6
Poor 1988	15.5	5.4
% Children Low Reading	22.0	7.4
% Children Low Math	28.0	14.9
% Children High Behavior Problem Index	9.5	36.0
Not Poor 1988	84.5	94.6
% Children Low Reading	9.2	3.2
% Children Low Math	11.0	5.9
% Children High Behavior Problem Index	8.2	7.2

Table 3
Percent of Children Scoring in Worst Quintiles of Behavior Problems Index and PIAT Reading and Math Scales
by Whether the Mother Was a Teenage Parent and Poverty Status in 1979 and 1988

	Poor 1979	Not Poor 1979
Not a Teenage Parent	11.8	88.2
Poor 1988	25.8	9.2
% Children Low Reading	14.8	15.7
% Children Low Math	28.6	26.9
% Children High Behavior Problem Index	18.0	33.0
Not Poor 1988	74.2	90.8
% Children Low Reading	17.1	5.6
% Children Low Math	17.3	7.1
% Children High Behavior Problem Index	14.7	11.7
Teenage Parent	31.2	68.8
Poor 1988	49.8	25.7
% Children Low Reading	33.9	22.9
% Children Low Math	36.5	24.1
% Children High Behavior Problem Index	26.9	30.5
Not Poor 1988	50.2	74.3
% Children Low Reading	22.5	11.4
% Children Low Math	22.2	10.8
% Children High Behavior Problem Index	21.3	14.6

Table 4
Percent of Children Scoring in Worst Quintiles of Behavior Problems Index and PIAT Reading and Math Scales by Whether the Mother Committed Illegal Acts and Poverty Status in 1979 and 1988

	Poor 1979	Not Poor 1979
Does Not Commit Frequent Illegal Acts	15.8	84.2
Poor 1988	36.1	11.5
% Children Low Reading	30.8	21.5
% Children Low Math	35.2	24.6
% Children High Behavior Problem Index	25.7	30.6
Not Poor 1988	63.9	88.5
% Children Low Reading	19.4	9.6
% Children Low Math	20.6	9.4
% Children High Behavior Problem Index	17.7	12.3
Commits Frequent Illegal Acts	13.9	86.1
Poor 1988	28.2	14.0
% Children Low Reading	37.0	21.4
% Children Low Math	45.0	32.2
% Children High Behavior Problem Index	29.4	40.0
Not Poor 1988	71.8	86.0
% Children Low Reading	30.3	5.5
% Children Low Math	21.6	4.7
% Children High Behavior Problem Index	30.1	18.8